

Garbage collection methods vary

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With cities preparing to lose funds from the state and other sources, trash could become a dollar-saving treasure.

Some cities passed most of their waste collection costs to residents to combat the expected shrinking of the Local Governments Fund, while others needed to save the employees, time and resources associated with billing thousands of homeowners' trash contracts.

Either way, few communities have collection costs fixed in as part of their general funds, and the ones who do are on the brink of change.

In a recent presentation to Willoughby City Council, Chris LeGros, director of planning and funding services CT Consultants, discussed the methods communities use for waste collection and billing. The cities, townships and villages in Lake County once appeared to be evenly spread out between three of four methods for payment: A community contract and payment; residential contracts and payments on a subscription basis; and

a community contract with residents making payments.

Three cities were listed under the "community contract with community and resident co-payment" list. However, one of them, Eastlake, shifted to a contract in which residents directly pay Republic Services Inc. for collection, relieving Eastlake of billing duties and the \$1 million-plus it spent on waste collection.

"We're out of the garbage business," Eastlake City Council President Dennis Morley said after council approved Republic's bid to provide services to residents for \$40.47 per quarter.

In Mentor, residents with one trash container and one recycling bin pay \$6.80 per month, solid waste coordinator Bonnie Rice said. The city pays an additional \$3.88 per month, per resident toward the trash portion of the bill.

Mentor Public Works Director Matt Schweikert said obtaining curbside recycling for residents was an important part of the Waste Management bid that the city accepted around the beginning of the new year. It freed up money that the city had previously used to subsidize an optional pro-

gram.

Eastlake's waste removal program also includes curbside recycling, something that city has been missing for a few years.

The quarterly bill residents will begin paying April 1 is about \$5 less than council first believed it would be.

Morley said he has received one critical email since the announcement, compared to several in opposition during the bidding process.

Morley said he believes the residents who initially emailed preferred the method in which garbage collection fees are already built into the general fund. Still, the opportunity to contract out that service saves cities money in these cash-strapped times.

"I'm not going to contract police and fire services out — those are things fixed with the city that aren't moving," Morley said. "Garbage, that was something that could be moved."

"I think a lot more people are relieved because they're not writing a check to the city," Morley said.

"That was a big cost to the city, and that's what these cities are starting to see."

Willoughby will likely be added to

that list, even if it's not this calendar year. Mayor Dave Anderson said the city is considering shifting the cost of trash pickup to its residents. That was the purpose of bringing LeGros in for her presentation earlier this year.

Willoughby's waste removal costs are already fixed into the city's general fund, but with the upcoming elimination of the estate tax and a lower piece of the state's Local Government Fund, Anderson said officials are thinking about alternative methods like Eastlake did.

Willowick officials have also discussed switching from a community contract, but that city's charter includes language that it must collect trash. Any change would require a vote.

"There comes a point when you just can't make that up," Anderson said of the upcoming revenue losses.

He added that Willoughby's contract with Waste Management allows it to change at any time. Anderson didn't provide a timeline, but didn't rule out seeking bids for the service.

"We're not under a time constraint or an emergency situation," he said, "but I would tell our residents that it's not going to me much longer."